# AN ADDRESS TO NEW MEMBERS

*By*

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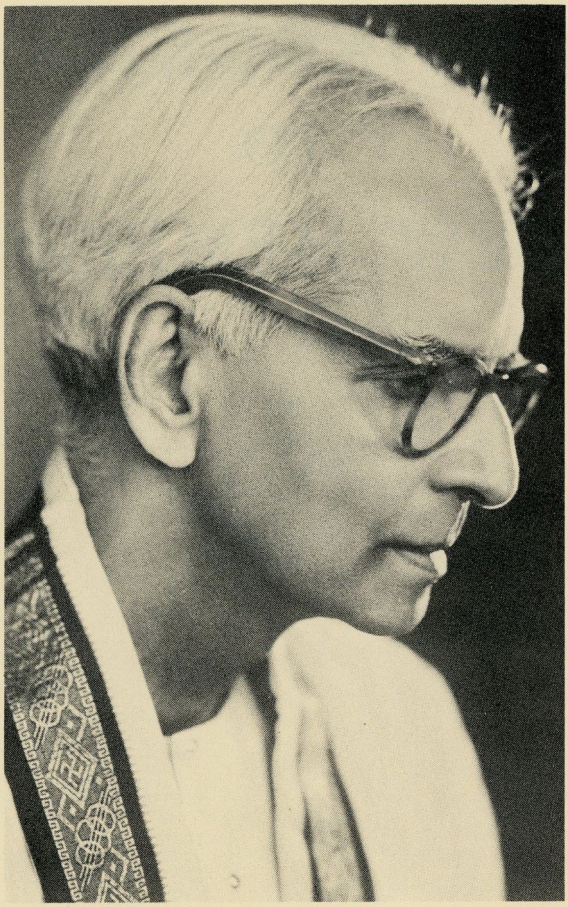

# AN ADDRESS TO NEW MEMBERS

By N. SRI RAM

(Delivered at Adyar, during the 82nd International Convention, Dec., 1957.)

IT is a great privilege for me and a source of happiness to us all to welcome the new members to The Theosophical Society. It has been the custom for very many years to have a small gathering like this, with some of the older members present, for the admission of new members.

Anyone who comes into the Society when a Convention of the Society is being held is surely much more affected by all that Theosophy means, than he would be in other surroundings and amidst other influences.

You have all read the Three Objects of the Society. You will notice that there is nothing in them of the nature of a creed, except the Universal Brotherhood of humanity, which Brotherhood is irrespective of race, creed, caste, sex or color. There are two other Objects, but they indicate certain lines of work: the study of com-

parative religion, philosophy and science, and the investigation of various laws and powers. So you can see that membership in The Theosophical Society leaves the individual absolutely free to come to his own truth, to his own conclusions, and there is only one requirement, which is this Brotherhood.

Of course the very designation of the organization is The Theosophical Society, which implies that there is such a thing as Theosophy. But there is in no document whatever a definition of Theosophy. Obviously it is a certain transcendental or spiritual Wisdom, but a Wisdom left undefined. The Theosophical Society maintains, and I feel it should always maintain, an atmosphere of absolute freedom, freedom to come to one's own understanding of things, of the true values in life, an understanding of whatever merits understanding and needs to be understood. A person cannot really come to the truth except in that freedom, because he has to move inwardly by his own natural and spontaneous movement to that which he feels to be the truth, which has a message to his heart. That is the reason for maintaining this freedom.

We have a broad platform of Brotherhood, but that is a natural relationship. If someone feels that this Brotherhood is not for him, then

surely he does not have a place in the Society, though even then he would be our brother. The Brotherhood is not confined to the members of the Society; it is the Brotherhood of the whole of humanity, including even those who have not yet realized the truth of Brotherhood, of whom there are undoubtedly many.

The Society has been in existence for more than eighty-two years. It is described in our theosophical journals as a body of students, of seekers for the Truth. If an organization has been in existence for eighty-two years, active all the time, surely there must be a certain body of ideas, of knowledge, which must have developed in the course of those years. Thus there is a vast literature to which we give the name Theosophy.

Theosophy itself is a Wisdom that exists in Nature; it is derived from no authority; it is like the beauty of the trees, the sky, the flowers. It exists, and it is for each individual to become aware of that beauty, to respond to it. In the same way, there is a certain order, a certain wisdom, that is to be discerned, that is embodied, in all that is about us. But it is for each individual to discover that wisdom. Whatever we have discovered we put into words, because that is the only way of shar-

ing our discoveries, our experiences, our understanding. What is thus put into words is also called Theosophy. The books on Theosophy represent only our understanding of what it is, and they have been found exceedingly valuable for our own guidance, full of illuminative statements, of suggestions and clues to a deeper and wider comprehension; they are all books available to be studied, but no book is an absolute authority. We do not confine the word "Theosophy" to the books that have been produced under the auspices of The Theosophical Society.

If Theosophy is a wisdom in Nature, there must have been always some minds aware of some of the aspects of that wisdom. Thus it is a wisdom which comes down from the most ancient times, has passed through many minds, has been given many forms of expression, some points stressed at a certain time, others brought into light by other people. All that is implied in the word "Theosophy." So from our present human standpoint, Theosophy is the whole heritage of truth, a synthesis of all that has been said or written about the truth. It represents our understanding of the Wisdom, and at the same time it is a synthesis of all that is true in any science, in any philosophy, in any religion.

An organization which is without any barrier

of race, caste, creed, sex, color or anything else, which envelopes the whole globe, stands for the highest truth attainable by man, yet at the same time preserves a platform of Universal Brotherhood and absolute freedom, is an organization which may be truly said to be unique. I feel that those of you who are coming into the Society, if you have some comprehension of its true character, will be able to carry it forward into the times to come, sounding the note of Truth, and ever elaborating it into fresh and new harmonies. I hope that will happen.

There are those of us who are the trustees for the work at present, but the work must be surrendered into other hands, just as we have received it from those who have gone before. It is to be hoped that the river of the theosophical movement will continue to flow in depth, retain its waters pure, and ever widen out till it reaches the infinite sea. It is a wonderful thing to belong to such a Society, but I would like to urge each member to feel responsible for what he can give to the work, taking it forward, which he can do only if he understands something of what Theosophy is for himself. It is not a question of being president or secretary of a Lodge, playing an important part, making a show and causing a great deal of disturbance. The move-

ment is promoted only when you take Theosophy, in its truest sense, deeply into yourself, and you are able to give it out not merely in words, but in your thought, your attitude, your every gesture and every relationship with those who are about you. That is the real way of propagating the Truth.

Of course we propagate it by words, but that is merely a symbol, an outer reflection of what should be the actuality or the reality. When I think a thought which is true, I do something to enrich the whole body of expression that might have taken place already, but when I utter a word without meaning anything, it is just a sound in the air. So although we have to use words, the mere words by themselves do not carry the message, but the message is carried by every inner movement that takes place, which has its origin in Truth.

We should try to propagate Theosophy not just by our outer activities on behalf of the Society, but by a deep comprehension of what Theosophy is, by trying to live the life, by breathing Theosophy out with every breath of ours. If we can do that, we would be helping all concerned. The work of the Society should be based upon the lives of its members, and in so far as the work does not correspond to the life, it lacks

vitality, it cannot go far, it cannot produce the effect it is intended to produce.

There are many books which you can read for yourselves; books of different types, some simple, some more advanced, but all intended to be a guide to your understanding, to give you a foothold, a stepping stone, the ground on which you can move onwards. But it is for you inwardly to come to your own appreciation of the Truth. Even if it be stated by someone else, you have to come to it by yourself. It is only then that Theosophy becomes real, and we breathe its life-giving fragrance; only then we are an influence that brings peace and enlightenment to all, in however small a measure.

You will naturally belong to some Lodge or other, and it is the responsibility of each member to try to make his Lodge as vital as possible. How can we do that? By being vital ourselves. In a Lodge we learn to co-operate with others. There we can practise Brotherhood in an intimate manner. It is only when we work with others who are different from ourselves that we know what is that way of meeting people which is true brotherhood, we understand what is important, what is not, we know where to give way, how to be happy in the good work of others, how to compromise without compromis-

ing the Truth. There are many things we can do together and learn by doing so that we cannot severally and separately. Although Theosophy may be a matter of individual realization and life, yet there is an important place in life for working together and expressing that life. Therefore, I would urge you to interest yourself in your Lodge, and if you find that the Lodge is dull, the activities are not inspiring, perhaps your presence in it will help to brighten them.

One should always try to make up for the deficiencies of others by the qualities one shows in oneself. If I find that you lack understanding, let me be more understanding, so that both of us will understand to some extent. It is no good criticizing others for their deficiencies, but it is very practical to attempt to make up for their shortcomings by our own good work and understanding. You may say: There are people in the Lodge who do not see as I do, I am full of enthusiasm and want to work, but they do not give me opportunities, they have their own ideas. But the whole world is full of narrow ideas; we have to work with people of all sorts, we cannot always be in the company of angels; perhaps we ourselves are not angels as yet or even fit to be in their company. Let us be pa-

tient and win over the people whom we find difficult at present. It is only by living with other people, coming to know different temperaments, by co-operating with them for every purpose we hold in common, that we will be able to arrive at that perfection, that all-roundness, that completeness, which is the goal, for the time being, for everyone of us. We round our development on every side by working with different people, seeing their points of view, understanding their ways, their qualities as well as shortcomings.

You can look upon the Lodge as a training-ground, which it is, in addition to being a center or a nucleus for the sending out of the life-forces of the Society. A Theosophical Lodge should be like a family, which has all kinds of people. In a family we are supposed to get on somehow, not desert one another because we are not like one another; we have to accept the others as they are and do the best possible.

We ought also to remember that beyond the Lodge there is the Section, and beyond every Section there is this world-wide movement, The Theosophical Society. He is the true Theosophist who has the world-wide view. It is not a question of travelling. One may travel everywhere and remain as narrow in outlook as before, whereas one need not stir from his place

to have a heart which is able to encompass everything. It is a question of being inwardly free from attachment to the forms of our particular conditioning, therefore frontierless in mind and heart; we can be that without going anywhere abroad.

Whether or not you have the opportunity to meet people of different types, the great aim in Theosophy is to have that broad and cosmopolitan spirit which excludes none. Let us think more in terms of humanity as a whole, than of our nation, our community, our own family and ourselves. There are plenty of people to think of communities, groups, nationalities, castes, and so on. I do not say we must not think of our nation; perhaps we have a duty to it, but in our thoughts, in wishing the good of people, let us keep this idea of one humanity. Underneath every difference of race, language, custom, sex and appearance, humanity is just one; it is merely the aspects that vary. In India there is the old saying that there is only one Truth, though the learned speak of it in many ways. We have of course an immediate responsibility to our surroundings. But because we are engaged with our surroundings we are apt to forget the wider world, in which there are millions of human beings like ourselves, often misled,

groping, seeking to find happiness, to find truth, but living lives which run into the sands.

Those great Beings whom we call the Elder Brethren are concerned with humanity as a whole, its progress in a real sense, its regeneration, what it needs, what it has to look forward to, and are not concerned with just one particular people, much less with one individual. What does it matter whether one individual is advanced to some point, to a certain pedestal, when there are millions of others still uncertain, still struggling, unable to lift themselves from the ground?

The Theosophical Society can become a distinctive organization, unlike any other, not merely because of its organization and its aims, but because of the quality imparted to it by its members. It should be a body permeated with vitality, with many centers of understanding, able to be a channel for the most beautiful influences, emanating wave-length after wave-length of beauty and expressions of Truth.

That is a hope which inspires, but it is for us to fulfil it. But how? Unless we have, first of all, a glimpse, a vision, a realization of the goal, of the change that must take place in ourselves, we cannot do much. It does not matter where a person stands in life; what is important is the

direction he faces. If we face Truth, we will come to it sometime, but if we turn away from it into all kinds of false ideas, we will be wandering the labyrinth of life. Therefore, let us keep our understanding as clear as possible. From a great distance one can look at a star, admire and appreciate its beauty; the vision of the star is open to everyone, however far he may be from the source of that scintillation. In the same way, it is possible for all of us when we are sincere and earnest in no narrow sense, when we live a life of true brotherhood, to gain a vision of the Truth, a far-off scent of it, even from a distance.

I hope I have said enough to indicate what is the nature of this grand philosophy, this synthesis, this presentation, which is Theosophy. We are apt to use big words with a small understanding. The name does not matter; it is what the name signifies which is important. That significance is so profound, so vast, that it is not possible for any individual to comprehend it, except in the smallest measure.

*—The Theosophist*

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